

# REPORT

TO THE

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

OF

NEW ENGLAND YEARLY MEETING OF FRIENDS,

UPON THE

CONDITION AND NEEDS

OF THE

FREED PEOPLE OF COLOR

IN WASHINGTON AND VIRGINIA.

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NEW BEDFORD :

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1864.

At a meeting of the Executive Committee of Friends appointed by our Yearly Meeting to promote efforts for the relief and improvement of the Freed people of color, held at Providence 11th mo. 18, 1864.

The Committee appointed at a previous meeting to obtain information relative to the condition and needs of the Freed people collected in Washington and at various points in Virginia and North Carolina, and also to consider the propriety of establishing an Agency, or Mission for these people in some suitable locality, presented the following Report, which was read, and accepted, and the several propositions of the Committee fully considered by the meeting. The Clerk was directed to procure the printing of 300 copies of the Report for the information of Friends ; and also to see that a copy is forwarded to each of our Monthly Meetings.

From the Minutes.

HENRY T. WOOD, *Clerk.*

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## R E P O R T .

On arriving in Washington, we went directly to the house of the President ; but, finding that it was the day of the Cabinet meeting, and that very many others were waiting to see him, we thought best to defer our visit until the next day. A part of our company then visited the Provost Marshal of the District, and procured a pass for us all to any point within the District of Columbia. On the following day, a friend kindly went with us to call on the President, who received us with great cordiality, read our letters, and endorsed one of them for us to take to Secretary Stanton, requesting him to give us such passes as would enable us to make the investigation we wished, and to aid us in such way as he could. Unfortunately, the Secretary was so much engaged that he could not see us at that time ; but his assistant furnished us with passes to all points where there are contraband camps within the departments of Virginia and North Carolina. We then went with our kind friends and the true and consistent

friends of the colored people, Dr. Breed and wife, through the northern part of the city, where large numbers of the freed people live. We found there families of four and six persons, and in some cases even more, living in houses of one room about ten feet square, and with a flat roof. Some of them were owned by the occupant, and were built on land for which they paid a ground rent of two dollars per month, others hired both houses and land, for which they paid from four to eight dollars per month; but in all cases the houses were simply a frame covered with boards, and very open, and must in winter be very cold. In nine cases out of ten, on inquiring after the husband and father, we received the answer, that he was in the government service: a few replied that he was in the rebel service: and in a few cases he was dead. The able bodied women were supporting themselves and children, as best they could, by taking in washing, or going out to days' work in families in the city, or in the hospitals, of which there are large numbers in the vicinity. Some of the children were attending school; but many were not, as there was no school in their neighborhood; and others had not suitable clothing. A few support themselves by gathering rags and bones and selling them. One old woman told us that she had once made as much as five dollars a week by this business. But there is still a very large body of feeble, old men, and women, and children, for whom there is no support; and we felt this to be a large field for the benevolence of Friends. We were convinced, that with assistance to procure houses at a reasonable cost or rent, and with visitors among them to go from house to house, teaching them habits of cleanliness and economy, they would soon become a self sustaining and respectable community. We visited the hospital for the colored people, where we found a colored physician, Dr. Powell, a descendant of Paul Cuffee, born in New Bedford and educated in England, and we were told that he was very efficient. Here was also a colored matron; and we were pleased with the appearance of neatness and comfort. This hospital is about to be removed nearer the city, and to a more healthful locality. Here we saw an instance of the injustice of an arbitrary rule: the nurse, who was a free woman, never a slave, had five dollars deducted from her monthly wages as the laborers among the Freedmen do. We saw the school-house, which is being built by Philadelphia Friends, on Nineteenth street, a substantial wooden building, 40x60 feet, containing a large school-room below, and lodging-rooms for teachers above, with an L for a kitchen. Probably when the teachers are gathered into this building, rations can be obtained for them from the government; and thus, the cost of supporting them there will be materially diminished. We called in the evening at Dr. Breed's, where we met Dr. Rapier, a colored man, who is the physician at large for the Freedmen in the city, and Dr. Abbott, another colored physician, who is to take the place of Dr. Powell, now at the hospital, but obliged to leave on

account of having been drafted into the army. We also met Harriette Carter and Eliza Heacock, two young women who are acting as visitors among the Freed people. The former has been here since the sixth month, and is sent by the Boston Freedmen's Relief Association. The latter has occupied her position for about six weeks, and is sent by the Pennsylvania Freedmen's Association. These worthy young women devote their time to going from house to house and inquiring after the welfare of the inmates; looking after the sick and reporting them to the physician; and also in preparing suitable food for them. It was through their influence, with that of Gulielma Breed, that the appointment of the city physician was obtained, and also rations for the sick. They encourage the people to send their children to school; and also to habits of cleanliness and morality. We were impressed with the feeling that theirs was a work not secondary in importance to the school teacher; in short, some of us felt that theirs should precede the teachers. "They most earnestly desire to have help in their laborious christian work, which, in our judgment, should have an immediate response. Some associations have freely sent teachers, but no one, who will go and see for themselves, will doubt for an instant the present pressing need of more laborers in this field; particularly as the cold weather is coming; and constant new arrivals increase the sickness and destitution." Dr. Breed and wife took us to some of the schools; we went first to a place called the Island, and to a settlement called New Fredericksburgh, where we were shown a school house, which was built by a colored man, once a slave, on a piece of land which was given him, rent free, for the purpose; in it, he had kept a school for some time. Unfortunately it was recess, and we did not see the school gathered. This settlement was composed almost entirely of refugees from Fredericksburgh. Another school house we visited on the Island, was built by the Scotch Covenanters, where they had a very large school. They had purchased a piece of land on which they had built this house, also used as a chapel, together with a dozen or more comfortable houses, which they rent to the colored people. If Friends of New England would follow their example, taking some other locality in the city, they would confer a lasting benefit on this poor people. From this place, we went to a school which was set up by the Trustees of colored schools in the city of Washington, and where the teachers were paid by the F. R. Association of Boston. We were very much pleased with the earnestness and enthusiasm of the teachers here; and the bright intelligent faces of the children showed the fruit of their labors. We visited Alexandria, and drove directly to the house of Harriet Jacobs, the agent of the New York Friends. She went with us, first to the school house where her daughter teaches. This was built last year by the colored people of the place. This year they have built a large addition to it, and are about plastering it and making class rooms. This building is

also used as a chapel. The Boston Association have sent them a male teacher, who, with Louise Jacobs and Virginia Lawton, will make a very efficient corps. We visited Peter Grant, a shoemaker with one leg, who was the first Freedman to build a house for himself in the place now called Grantville, and where some hundreds of his people have now followed his example. We went into many of their houses, and were gratified with the appearance of neatness and comfort compared with those of Washington. This improvement we attribute in great measure to the labors of Harriet Jacobs and Julia A. Wilbur, who is from Rochester, New York, whose exertions for these people have been indefatigable. We passed through the wards of the colored hospital, which is both for citizens and soldiers, and found them neat and comfortable. We saw the matron, a free colored woman, also the chaplain, a colored man, with both of whom we were pleased. Six old women, in their "Home" procured for them by Harriet Jacobs, seemed comfortable and happy. The care-taker of these women is paid by the Worcester F. R. Association. Very many of the freed people of Alexandria own their houses, which generally consist of two rooms and have a little yard; for the land, they pay a ground rent of one dollar per month; but there is still a great number, who are living in very poor buildings, for which they pay a large rent, to the superintendent appointed by the government. By great efforts on the part of Friends, this rent has been reduced from what was formerly charged, but it is still large for the miserable places they occupy. At Freedman's Village, at Arlington Heights, are nearly 3,000 persons. Here the government has erected comfortable and cheerful houses, from a fund accruing from the deduction of five dollars from the wages of all employed by government. Rations are supplied to those not able to work, by the government yet the people do not seem happy or contented; they are entirely under military discipline, and feel that it is little better than slavery. One woman, much better situated than many others, said, "Don't feel as if I was free, 'pears like there's nobody free here." The teachers in the school here are paid by the American Tract Society. There are at present about 300 children in the school. The teacher told us there were 900 last spring. We found that a few had been apprenticed out, but very many had died. We asked the teacher, how many? She replied, "Oh, I don't know, ever so many." We were told that it is often necessary to use force to make the children attend school; which fact is proof that there must be something very wrong in the system; as in all other places that we visited, we found that they were glad to go. Although there are 1,100 acres of land, and large quantities of vegetables raised upon them, none are consumed there; they are all sent to Washington and sold, and the people, children and all, are obliged to live on army rations. This we felt to be the great cause of the fearful mortality which has pre-

vailed among the children. The old women, who, even as slaves, had been accustomed to different diet, begged hard for money to buy a "few taters." There is also great need here of suitable employment for women. We were impressed that this is a large field for the benevolence of Friends;—there is not so much demand for their money, for government is bountiful in its supplies; but for agents to see that the charities of government are rightly directed. We felt that untold good might result in this place by a change from military to civil rule. Mason's Island has upon it about 300 refugees; these are sent here immediately on their arrival in Washington, and here await distribution to other places. We also learned from some of the people that others are sent here for a punishment. It is from this island that boys have been apprenticed, which has caused such dissatisfaction among the people by separating families. They have strong family attachments, and are very unwilling to go from the place to which they hope some missing member of their family may chance to come. Here as at Arlington we were pained with the idleness of the women. There seems to be no work provided for them. At City Point we found that refugees are constantly arriving; but that a small proportion of them are allowed to remain; only as many as could find employment there, the men as laborers in the different departments, and the women as washerwomen for the officers and the hospitals. Each hospital corps has its little community of negro quarters attached. We learned from the surgeon of one, that a school had been started in his corps; and from another, that one was in progress under his jurisdiction. We hoped that others would follow his example. We were told that there was great need of clothing here, both for those who pass through and those who remain, as none can be purchased here for women and children. We felt that an agent should be sent here immediately, with a large quantity of clothing, shoes, and blankets, if we would prevent great suffering as the cold weather increases. At Norfolk we found much being done by systematic organization. By order of Gen. Butler, the city had been divided into districts and teachers appointed as in our New England free school system. We visited some of the schools, and though we found them just organizing on their new plan, we were much interested. The Boston and New York Freedmen's Relief Associations, and the American Missionary Society, each send ten teachers here. The school-houses are provided by government, and the teachers are supplied with homes and rations. We visited the rope-walk, the place to which the new comers are taken, and in which there is a hospital for the sick—also the Taylor Farm, where there are about 1,000 of the people, mostly the wives and families of soldiers now in the army. Here nearly two hundred houses have been built by the government and much been done to render them comfortable; but here as well as at the rope-walk, we felt that there was great need of more efficient officers to dispense the

government charities. Our friend Sarah F. Smiley has recently established herself here as a volunteer visitor among the families. We think her services will be of great value in looking up cases of sickness and destitution; in alleviating suffering, in bringing to light the abuses of government charities; and in rendering advice and assistance in various ways. She is about to establish a mother's meeting, in which she will teach them to sew, to make and mend their clothing. At Fortress Monroe and Hampton, the people seem to be very thriving; the men find plenty of employment from the government, and the women in washing for the hospitals, and in keeping eating saloons and stalls. The store established by Philadelphia Friends, and kept by Enoch Harlan, is well patronized and is of great value to the colored people. Here articles are sold to them at such prices as will simply cover the cost and thus they are saved from the exorbitant rates charged by the sutlers. We passed the night at the Orphanage, established by the Women's Aid Society, of Philadelphia; and in which there are at the present time, 17 girls. Their intention is to keep them here until suitable places can be found for them in families. They have a school house on the grounds and a teacher sent by the same society. The other schools in these places are taught by teachers sent by the American Missionary Society. Gen. Butler is building a very large school house at Hampton, in which are to be accommodated some six or eight hundred pupils, to be taught somewhat on the Lancasterian plan. In the Norfolk district, under the care of Capt. Brown, and that of Hampton and Fortress Monroe, under the charge of Capt. Wilder, the organization under the government is very complete. The Friends of New York are about to establish four stores in Norfolk and vicinity. In Capt. Wilder's department, Friends of Philadelphia are doing a great work, at Yorktown particularly, where they have established a mission house, with a store and several schools. We understand they are also about to take several farms under their charge. The means of conveyance to Yorktown being so uncertain, we were obliged to relinquish the idea of going there, which we much regretted. We felt that in these departments, the greatest need was for energetic Northern men and women rightly to direct the charity of the government and prevent its abuse.

Thus from observation made by your committee in the various localities of Washington, Arlington Heights, Mason's Island, Alexandria, City Point, Norfolk, Fortress Monroe and Hampton, we were prepared to give it as our opinion, that Washington and vicinity should be the field of operations for New England Friends. The question may be raised why we have come to this decision, and we would reply that in all other localities the government renders them systematic aid; but in Washington this is not the case. We feel that should Friends decide to establish themselves there and should they take the right measures they may procure

the same patronage. There is probably a larger number of freed people gathered there, than anywhere else in the same space. The labor of the men is wanted there and many of the women find work, but much is needed to be done for the women and children. We would therefore recommend that a female mission agent, or visitor, be employed, to visit the families, to ascertain their circumstances and wants, to render them such advice as she may deem necessary—and where she finds it to be required, to distribute clothing, to be sent to her by us; and to obtain for them such nourishment in sickness as may be procured at a kitchen established in connection with the colored hospital, and which has been provided through the exertions of those visitors already located there:—That an agent should be immediately sent to City Point with clothing, blankets, and shoes, and remain there to distribute it as long as the committee deem it necessary, and to render them such aid in their transition state as he may feel to be required:—That a lot should be purchased in a suitable locality in Washington, whereon shall be erected a building, calculated for a school-room and store-room for clothing, both for free distribution and for sale at moderate rates; and also for an assortment of goods suited to the wants of the Freedmen, and to be sold to them at prices barely covering the cost. This building also to contain rooms for the accommodation of the storekeeper and family, the Mission visitor and teacher. By this plan we think they would procure rations from government and live at much less cost than to board at other places. This may seem like a great work, and some may doubt our ability for its accomplishment. We do not wish in any degree to place ourselves as judges of Friends of New England. Yet we feel called to say that there is much due from us to this poor down-trodden people, and that we ought not to pass this crisis without nobly responding to their necessities. In the different localities we have visited, we have been in the vicinity of about sixty thousand of these people, all more or less requiring assistance. They need our prayers; and more, they need our material aid. They need our thousands, our five hundreds, our hundreds our fifties, and our tens. They should have something from every adult and child, according to his ability, and we can but hope that all will feel it a pleasure to contribute freely to enable this enterprise to go on and prosper as worthy of the people whom it represents.

For the Committee,

EDWD. EARLE,  
ANN B. EARLE,  
GULIELMA W. HOWLAND.

Fortress Monroe, 11th mo. 10th, 1864.